

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-33. (Cancelled).

34. (Currently amended) A method for identifying an inhibitor of heart valve degeneration, said method comprising:

- a) contacting heart valve cells with a stimulant such that said cells proliferate,
- b) contacting said cells with a test compound, and
- c) determining whether or not [[if]] said test compound reduced the proliferation of said cells and whether or not said test compound increased nitric oxide synthase activity in said cells, wherein the reduction of proliferation and the increase in nitric oxide synthase activity indicates that said test compound is an inhibitor of heart valve degeneration.

35. (Currently amended) A method for determining the safety of a drug, said method comprising:

- a) contacting heart valve cells with said drug, and
- b) determining whether or not [[if]] said drug induced proliferation of said cells and whether or not said drug increased nitric oxide synthase activity in said cells, wherein the induction of proliferation and the absence of an increase in said nitric oxide synthase activity indicates that said drug promotes heart valve degeneration.

36. (New) The method of claim 34, wherein said cells are cells obtained from a mature pig.

37. (New) The method of claim 34, wherein said test compound is an HMG CoA reductase inhibitor.

38. (New) The method of claim 34, wherein said stimulant is LDL.
39. (New) The method of claim 34, wherein the proliferation of said cells is measured using a thymidine uptake assay.
40. (New) The method of claim 34, wherein said nitric oxide synthase activity is measured using an NADPH disphorase reaction.
41. (New) The method of claim 35, wherein said cells are cells obtained from a mature pig.
42. (New) The method of claim 35, wherein the proliferation of said cells is measured using a thymidine uptake assay.
43. (New) The method of claim 35, wherein said nitric oxide synthase activity is measured using an NADPH disphorase reaction.